

# Children Are Our Teachers

## Four Life Lessons From a Three Year Old

A mentor I once had said to me, *“Raising children is effortless. All you have to do is remember that they are the teachers and you are the student.”* When my teacher was three years old, his lessons were coming at me fast and more furious. I shudder to think of how much educating I am going to need by the time he becomes a teenager! However, that’s far off in the future, and I am trying to live in the present. For now, I am appreciating that he was loving me in the only way that he knew how. Here are four of the life lessons that my three-year old son taught me that have helped me to enjoy living in the present while parenting him.

**1. He taught me how to be patient when he can’t make up his mind.** One way that he taught me this was by wanting the opposite of whatever I suggested. For breakfast one morning, I asked him what he wanted.

He said, “I don’t know!”

I suggested one of his favorites, “How about hot cereal?”

“I don’t want hot cereal,” he exclaimed. “Don’t give me hot cereal. No sir-ree. I won’t eat hot cereal!”

“Okay”, I said, “What do you want?”

He answered with conviction. “I don’t know.”

That’s okay. I figured hunger would eventually drive him to make a decision, and I patiently went about my business.

**2. He taught me to respect my own needs even when he wanted to manipulate me.** He loved to have me pick him up and carry him, something I was less interested in doing as he grew bigger.

He began by saying, “I want you to carry me.”

I responded by mirroring his words, “You want me to carry you.”

“I want you to carry me, RIGHT NOW!” He repeated himself to make sure I was getting it.

“You want me to carry you, RIGHT NOW!” I mirrored him once more, capturing his words, tone of voice and body language as accurately as I could, in order to validate his feelings.

Then I said, “Let me see your legs. Are they broken?”

“Yes, they are. See, they’re tired. They don’t want to walk all that way! Carry me!”

“No thanks. I don’t want to.”

“But you have to!”

“Why do I have to?”

“Because I said so. I want you to so you have to.” Such a typical ‘center of the universe’ kid response.

I leaned forward, looked him in the eye and was lovingly honest with him. “No thanks. I don’t want to.” Then I just kept walking. Despite that, he didn’t give up too easily, which is what makes him such a great teacher! But I learned how to stick to my position, when that was right for me.

**3. He taught me how to let him solve his own problems even when he wants to blame me for having caused his problem.** One day for lunch, he wanted to have a liverwurst sandwich.

He insisted that he wanted his sandwich left whole and uncut. After I spread one slice of the bread, he suddenly decided that he wanted peanut butter and honey. So I said, “Okay!” I spread peanut butter and honey on the other slice, cut each slice in half and made up two half sandwiches.

He became very upset when he realized what I had done. “I want a whole sandwich! I don’t want it cut in half like this. I want it like this, not like that!” using his hands to show me exactly how he wanted it cut, like I was some kind of dummy who couldn’t quite figure out the obvious, which I may well be.

It did no good whatsoever to point out that I couldn’t put the slices together anymore. After all, the bread was cut and besides, peanut butter and liver just don’t go together, I explained.

“Yes they do!” whereupon he promptly put the two sandwiches one on top of the other, Dagwood style. “I’m having a BIG sandwich,” he beamed proudly. I’m always amazed at how

he can find a way to solve his problems without me doing it for him.

**4. He is teaching me to keep my sense of humor no matter how unhappy he decides to be.**

One day, I wanted him to have a pee. He responded in his usual passionate way. “I don’t want to go pee. I don’t have to go pee. No sirree. I won’t go pee!”

My instincts suggested otherwise. I steered him over to the toilet anyway, whereupon he pulled down his pants, still crying and said, “I don’t have to go pee. See. I don’t have to!” as he pushed out his penis to show me that nothing was happening. One second later, a stream poured out.

I grinned at him and exclaimed, “You’re right Jared. There’s no pee. Look, it’s *juice* coming out of your wee-wee. Why I think, I think it’s *Jared juice!*”

He immediately started to laugh. “It’s Jared juice. Yeah-h-h!”

I marvel at how fast he can shift from crying to laughing, as long as I don’t go to that unhappy place with him.

**Take some lessons from my three year old teacher.**

When you are having a relationship with someone, remember that every one of us has a three-year old in our lives. If you haven’t seen your three-year old lately, I suggest that you take a look in the mirror. Yes sir-ree, if you look past the wrinkles, you’ll find him or her! If that doesn’t do the trick, ask your spouse. They’ll tell you what part of you is three years old.

**These lessons will work for you, no matter who you are dealing with or how old they are.**

1. Remember to be patient when they can’t make up their mind.
2. Remember to respect your own needs when they want you to do things that you don’t want to do.
3. Remember to let them solve their own problems whenever possible, even when they blame you for having caused the problem.
4. Remember to keep your sense of humor no matter how unhappy another person decides to be.

All of us are walking around offering each other lessons from the three-year old within us. Life gets a lot easier if you can feel grateful for the lesson that they are about to inflict upon you. Only then can you appreciate what they have to teach you. Only then can you say to yourself, “I wonder how this person is going to love me today?”

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